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To All NAPO Membership:

I would like to introduce myself to the members of NAPO. I'm Dr. Peter Killeen, Port Authority of NY & NJ Police Unions Stress Counselor. Recently, I spoke with NAPO President Mick McHale and asked if he would be interested in sharing with his membership my recent letter sent out to members of both the Port Authority Police Unions, as well as the NJ State PBA. The purpose of my letter was to simply update everyone on the potential psychological impact on a First Responder when going through a crisis situation. Below are some simple guidelines and recommendations, as we all continue moving forward during these uncertain times. Everyone has been suddenly thrust into a world of learning as to what a global pandemic means, its impact on our communities, and what is required of us to mitigate its pervasive affects. As you have experienced over the last several weeks, it has become increasingly more difficult for everyone involved: the first responder, the community, your family members and loved ones. No individual has been left untouched. Some of you may have lost people close to you over the past few weeks. Personally, I recently found out yesterday that a retired PA Officer, an academy classmate of mine, passed from Covid19.

Many of you have family members who have been working in hospitals and on the front lines as EMT's, nurses, and doctors for the past several weeks. They have experienced trauma and sadness each day, but have continued on, in a selfless manner, attempting to make it better for every person they are attending to with uncompromised compassionate care. Their work is nothing less than heroic.

What has happened around the world has become life changing. **This is your 9/11.** Over the past several weeks you have experienced trauma, loss, fear, uncertainty, vulnerability and apprehension as to what the future holds, not only for all of us, but for future generations to come. As a First Responder, the public and family members look upon you as the go to person who has all the answers. This can become an overwhelming responsibility, can wear you down, and possibly have a negative effect on you, both physically and psychologically. Comments from the public, and even family members, can often be cynical and annoying, rather than hopeful and optimistic. When you are exposed to a more than usual amount of negativity, it can eventually cause you to view the world in the same negative way. I encourage you to place yourself in as many positive situations as possible, in order for you to keep your own world view in check.

Responding to other's fears and concerns means that a greater responsibility has been placed on you causing you to work substantially harder. This can often lead to exhaustion and "*Secondary Trauma,*" frequently referred to as "*compassion fatigue.*" It is so important that you practice self-care and do what you can to keep yourself as healthy as possible. Getting adequate sleep and proper nutrition, will help you to stay on your game. Your family and the public are depending on you to be there for them.

It is important for every first responder to perform frequent self-checks in order to determine how they, themselves, are functioning. It's equally important to remain calm and resilient mentally, physically and spiritually. Try integrating into your day breathing exercises (see below), that will in turn lower your heart rate, relax your muscles and quiet your thoughts. In addition, find a balance in your life. Don't make the job your entire world. Do things to help refocus your view of your surroundings.

A First Responder's family already experiences greater concern than the general population. During this time of dealing with a potentially devastating illness, this concern grows exponentially. There is good reason for your family members to be concerned about you bringing home from your workplace unknown germs or the virus, which in turn increases their level of anxiety. With this in mind, take extra steps to minimize their fears of your other world (the job), e.g., changing your clothes in the garage, or taking a shower immediately upon entering your house. Finally, reassure them that their safety comes above all else and that you would never put them in harm's way.

Below are some very simple steps you can take to give your loved ones a greater sense of comfort and ease in the upcoming days:

The First Responder

- As a First Responder you are susceptible to developing Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). This is a very common reaction to overexposure to trauma or critical incidents. Be mindful of any changes in yourself. Don't hesitate. If need to reach out and get the help you need. Fear of the stigma doesn't play a part here and there is no shame or weakness in speaking to a mental health professional.
- Keep things in perspective and remember that these are extraordinary times, and this too shall pass
- Continue to keep social distancing when at work and out and about in public
- Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds to kill any of the virus on your skin
- Be mindful of your sleep. If possible, try to get at least 6-7 hours, if not 8 (this is tough for cops)
- Be mindful of your diet as best you can. Limiting the amount of alcohol, tobacco, sugar, salt, caffeine and processed foods throughout your day. Eat as healthy as is possible while going through this stressful time
- Practice deep breathing exercises when possible. 4 breaths in from your diaphragm, hold it for 4 seconds and then release for an 8 count. Repeat this 4-5 times. This will help you relax physically and psychologically. When you first wake up and when you retire for the evening are best
- Limit your exposure to the media. Select one outlet and stay with it. Repeated negative media will eventually lead to anxiety and depression over time

Family

- Be mindful that not all children perceive stress as an adult would. Be aware of any behavioral changes in your children
- If you, as the parent or guardian, come across as being anxious, worried, or depressed, there is a good possibility your children will pick up on what you are feeling and may manifest similar reactions
- Continue to **reassure, reassure, and reassure** family members that everything is going to be ok
- Have dinners together, create positive discussions around the table, preferably a topic other than Covid19, keeping everyone engaged on some level
- Have a specific night designated as "movie night" with the family. Make another night, "pizza night." It's important for kids to have some kind of structured schedule.
- Keep discussions in the home light and positive

I hope this information will be helpful to you and your family. Again, I would like to thank President Mick McHale for the opportunity to reach out to you at this time. Many thanks for all that you do for your departments and the public. You're all exceptional individuals. As mentioned earlier in this letter, if you have a family member who is a First Responder, please thank them for their heroic work over these past few weeks. They have made a tremendous difference, sacrificed their own safety, saved many lives and changed the world for the better.

If you have concerns or would like to talk, just pick up the phone. Everything is held in confidence. We are all in this together.

I would like to close with a quote that I believe speaks to all of us at this time by encouraging everyone to believe and have hope for a brighter future for everyone.

"But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Be safe, be healthy and hopeful. Happy Easter and Happy Passover to each of you and your families.

God Bless,

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